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LIBERAL EDUCATION

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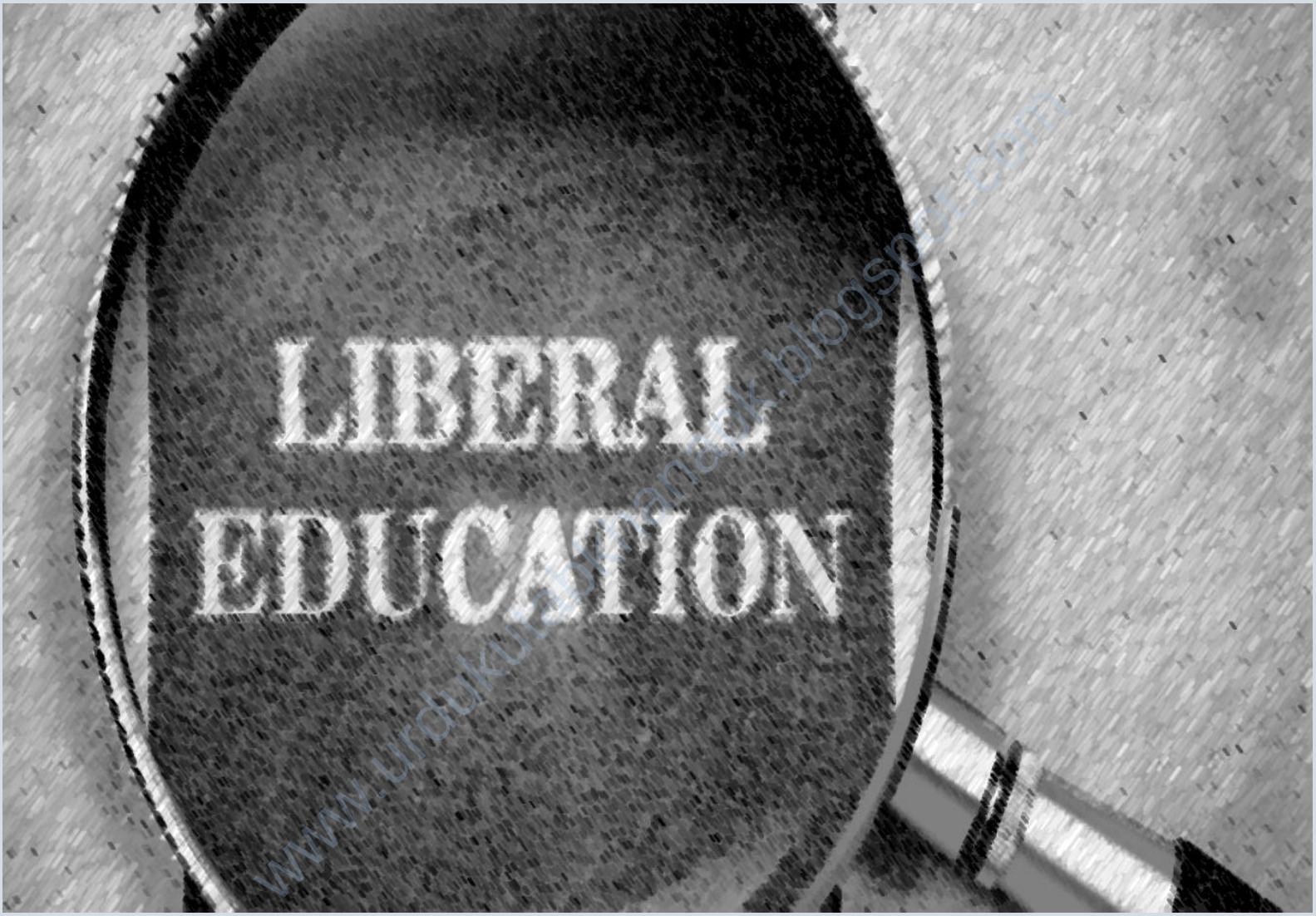

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Liberal Education

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Education is the most important factor behind the progress man has achieved in this world. It has been the permanent character of human history and evolution of thought. However, in the past, it used to be prerogative of only a few privileged men and the pace of development was quite slow. Since it has been disseminated to common people, there has been rapid growth in every sphere of development: science, technology, sociology, politics, anthropology, etc. Now it is treated as basic human right of every man. Though, it encompasses a wide sphere of knowledge, it has been metamorphosed by man according to his needs. It has been mainly applied as a tool of economic development, which has limited its application. Consequently, people are deprived of the potential education offers for the overall development of personality and stability of society. The chaos in modern world is also partly due to this fault. Therefore, in order to meet the multi-dimensional challenges, man faces in the world, it is essential to impart real education i.e. liberal education.

The liberal education has been defined in many ways, though emphasizing the similar essential elements. The best definition is offered by the "Association of American Colleges and Universities".

"Liberal education means to empower an individual and prepare him to deal with diversity, complexity and change".

As manifest from the definition, the purpose of education is to enable man to surpass the challenges faced in the world, to know and obtain his rights and to accommodate himself in the constantly changing environment in the present day competitive world.

The importance of liberal education in this contemporary globalised world is greatest than ever before. The world has become so shaped that every economic and social activity requires modern and advanced means of communication and technology. The transformation of technological development is on a very fast track. There is a demand of more interactive and communica tive manpower to run this complex system. Moreover, despite the interdependence on each other, the diversity in different areas is in sharp contrast. Hence, the man is required to be quite sufficiently prepared to move forward. And the instrument that can enable him to face these challenges is nothing but liberal education.

This is why the renowned scholar “Skarnovey” says: “Liberal education: the developing countries must adopt it as it is a necessity”. Nevertheless, it is essential for every nation but the developed countries are already ahead in this sphere. The developing countries, which are still far behind, need to forge efforts to transform their education system in order to catch up with the rest of the world. Not only because it helps in achieving economic development but also because it fulfills the need of society in every sphere of life.

The sphere of liberal education is wide enough to call it real education. Basically, education is aimed to develop whole being of a person. It is necessary to educate man to learn social ethics, cultural values, religious obligations, ways and means of a stable society and skills of professional competitiveness. Liberal education, simply, fulfills all these essential needs. It emphasises the development of a citizen who is professionally capable of living in the society in civilised way - the way which is not only beneficial to himself alone, but also fruitful for other members of his family, community and society.

It is best elaborated in the words of Kurth Kahin; “Liberal education teaches something about everything and everything about something”. His words can be best understood by contrast to the maxim “Jack of all; master of none”. Simultaneously, there are also people who are “Jack of none but master of one”. The people, who acquire general education without proficiency in any specific subject, are explained by the first maxim. While some people who are very skilled and highly qualified in one field like an engineer, scientist or doctor but do not know any other subject or field of life; these are referred to the latter assumption. However, liberal education is a moderate way between both the polar positions. It is aimed at making a person 'a good professional in any one field' and also to 'possess knowledge and skills about other important fields'. More importantly, it makes constructive members of society better described as “Jack of all; master of one”.

In such a way, the objectives of liberal education are multifaceted, which address the requirement of society to a considerable extent. These objectives are briefly discussed here:

Firstly, it is the most important for a man to be an informed citizen. The people who are concerned only with their single professional field of occupation cannot be ideally good citizens. They would only be members and nationals of a community or nation. A good citizen is required to be participatory in the social and political building of community, which is the foundation of any

society. As the actions of man are based on information and knowledge, without these none understands the obligation towards community and resultantly remains inactive member of society. However, but if the students are inculcated the knowledge of their needs and roles, they would be quite prepared to foresee occurrences and would direct their thoughts and actions towards social and political participation. This can be achieved when the system of education is made liberal which does not aspire to produce only technical robots in human shape but informed and good citizens.

Secondly, the philosophy of liberal education envisages the development of creative thinking among the students. Creative thinking has acquired fundamental place in the education system of advanced countries. The students are encouraged to "think a new". The creative experiments, creative writings and creative art lead to frame the development of thought process. Though, it is practised in western countries, it owes its origin to the most influential scholars and artists of Greek period and early Muslim era. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Ibn-e-Khaldun, Galileo, Khuw-arzmi, Newton, to name a few, all were creative thinkers. In short, whole of the development in the world and education itself is the result of creative thinking. On the contrary, the limited application of education is insufficient to produce brilliant minds. The specific technological development devoid of human values and ethics has failed to form the basis of a viable society. Thus, it is the objective of liberal education to teach the students various subjects like history, sociology, philosophy and psychology besides their professional field, so that creative thought is encouraged to be developed among them. Therefore, we need to introduce liberal education in order to secure our future based on collective ideals.

Thirdly, liberal education improves the skills and competitiveness of students, which is necessary to enable them to get foothold in the competitive market. For example a typist may have good efficiency in his field but computers have replaced typewriter. People like to get their papers typed on computer in order to save their document and to get good command. Now, the excellent typist is in trouble, he would go jobless in the market unless he learns to operate computer. Same is the case with every field of employment. The modes of technology are being transformed very rapidly. In order to meet the demands of market one should be quite prepared and skilled. Hence, the knowledge of mathematics, science, computer literacy and technological acquaintance are necessary to be imparted to the students, which can be achieved through liberal education.

Fourthly, as the world has become a global village, the importance of communication skills has been increased manifold. A person must be proficient in national and at least one international language. He must know how to send e-mail, voice-mail or to carryout visual communication. The social change compels the person to change the job for better opportunities. The talented people feel an urge to move towards other countries as well in order to actualise their talent and to obtain maximum result. This is where the communication skills are mostly required. All the communication techniques, basically, listening, speaking and writing are essential ingredients. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the skills of students through methods of listening comprehension and speaking ability tests. All the examinations of foreign languages comprise these elements and even very talented students from developing countries fail to go abroad due to lack of these communication skills in international languages.

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These few objectives of liberal education underline its importance and need in the developing countries, including Pakistan. Unfortunately, it has not been taken seriously.

The system of education in our country is obsolete. It is devoid of the contemporary methodology of teaching and the curriculum is almost from primary to university level. Computer is studied as a field of study only, not as a skill. Even in most of the universities it is taught only to the students of computer department seeking degree in that subject, let alone its use at primary and secondary level. In universities the students of other subjects like sociology, languages, arts and other sciences are not taught the computer skills. This lags them far behind from students of other countries and few quality institutes of the country.

Same is true of languages. English though introduced from primary level, is not taught according to the modern techniques of comprehension. Only reading lessons and knowing meaning of words cannot enable students to master the language. The methodology of English departments in universities is also in question. The national language, Urdu, is also not focused at any level of education. Learning of both these languages is important to produce capable and competitive students at the national and international level.

The fate of the students of other subjects is also not much different. On the one hand, they are deprived of computer and language skills; on the other they do not become proficient in their field of interest as the proper methodology is not applied. Faculty members are not well qualified, research is not pursued and creative thought is ignored.

These defects of our education system are the main reasons of the chaos, unemployment, poverty and social instability in our society. In order to overcome these shortcomings, we must adopt the liberal education system without any further delay. However, this requires a well thought out and comprehensive policy to improve the existing education system.

Primarily, we should redesign our curriculum at all levels. All the major components/subjects of liberal education: sociology humanism, citizenship, history, philosophy, languages, computer and sciences must be introduced in every tier of education from primary to university levels in accordance with the capacity of students and the needs of society.

Secondarily, all the institutions should be equipped with computer and scientific laboratories and libraries. The research and creative thinking should be encouraged through modern techniques of education. In this regard the accessibility and equality of all sections of our stratified society must be ensured in order to achieve uniform development.

Lastly, the faculty must be energised by providing skilled and experienced teachers. The existing teachers should be trained to equip them with modern techniques of teaching methodology. Fresh and young blood must be encouraged to join education field as a profession by enhancing the monetary incentives in the education sector.

This policy will yield tremendous benefits to the future of a nation. The liberal education is hailed because it brings concrete advantages. The young generation of Pakistan makes bulk of the population of country. According to a report of the State Bank of Pakistan 65 per cent of the educated youth is unemployed due to irrelevance of their skills with market. If this portion of

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population is properly skilled, it will prove to be a boost to the economy as the manpower is considered a resource in all countries of the world.

Another benefit would be the eradication of poverty. Once our youth are employed, they will naturally add to the income of their families and consequently eradicate their poverty. It will also help in raising the living standard of our common man as it is directly proportional to the income of a family.

The liberal education would create sense of understanding and cooperation among the people. The contemporary chaos of extremism and isolationism are due to lack of approach towards collective interests and common goals among people. Once they realise their social obligations and think creatively they will initiate participating positively in the stability of society.

It is quite clearly manifested from the discussion that liberal education, which is the real education, is an essential component of good governance and stable society. It not only helps an individual to progressively achieve goals but also gives impetus to economic, political and social stability to a state. In short, it forms the basis of human development in this complex global world of diversity and challenges. It offers a way towards a better change.

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